



BOSTON CITY COUNCIL

www.cityofboston.gov/citycouncil
city.council@cityofboston.gov

One City Hall Square ◊ 5th Floor ◊ Boston, MA 02201 ◊ Phone: (617) 635-3040 ◊ Fax: (617) 635-4203

WORKING SESSION MINUTES

EVENT: *Committee on Government Operations*

MEETING DATE: *March 27, 2017*

MEETING LOCATION: *Boston City Hall, 5th Floor, Piemonte Room*

MEETING TIME: *3:00PM (start 3:09PM, end 4:30PM)*

SUBJECT: *Docket #0132, Ordinance Regarding the Reduction of Plastic Bags in Boston*

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Voting Members: Councilor Michael F. Flaherty, Chair; Councilors Matt O'Malley (Sponsor), Timothy McCarthy, Ayanna Pressley

Non-voting Members: Councilors Frank Baker, Michelle Wu (Sponsor), Tito Jackson

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

Councilor Flaherty convened the hearing and summarized Docket #0132. Councilor O'Malley provided opening remarks and gave an overview of the ordinance and its purpose, and described the process to this point in developing the ordinance, including a 2016 hearing and task force meetings throughout the year. Councilor Wu provided opening remarks as well, and highlighted the view that the ordinance should be seen, not as a tax, but as a way to opt out of costs that had previously been built in to retail prices. The sponsors stressed the good of the ordinance for the environment and for the City, and expressed hope for a collaborative session leading to an ordinance on which all councilors and the Administration could agree.

Carl Spector, Commissioner, and Susan Cascino, Director of Recycling, from the City's Environment Department, were at the table on behalf of the Administration. Commissioner Spector reiterated the Administration's view from the 2016 hearing, that while they support the goals of the proposal, they do not support the ordinance at this time. The Administration testified that they are working on a more comprehensive plan to address solid waste in Boston, and believe that the most effective use of City resources would be through a comprehensive plan that would address both plastic bags, and others sources of waste together. The Administration also stated their concern that the ordinance would burden low-income households and the elderly. The Committee inquired as to whether there were any ongoing or planned partnerships with other City departments or private organizations that could help with litter and encourage recycling in the meantime. The Administration said they would be willing to look into partnerships. The Committee talked about the importance of educational outreach for environmental initiatives – past failures in Boston, such as with recycling bins, and success in other cities, like Seattle's plastic bag ban. The Committee discussed whether it was possible to include waivers in the ordinance for certain populations.

The Committee questioned Michael Orr, from Cambridge Public Works, about the practical effects of their bag ban. Mr. Orr talked about Cambridge's educational and practical outreach, specifically for seniors, the reduction of single use bag consumption in their city by percentage, and the lack of negative reactions from constituents post-implementation. Mr. Orr testified that in Cambridge, City enforcement and compliance effort is minimal. The Committee discussed the issue of disparate burdens in low income communities, the importance of clean neighborhoods, and the choices and sacrifices communities may be willing to make for the environment.

The Committee also heard from members of the public – both for and against the ordinance. Issues discussed included the burden on seniors and small business owners in terms of cost and logistics, the cost of different kinds of bags, and the costs of plastic in the recycling stream. Some advocates suggested giving bags away, convincing retailers to embrace a marketing opportunity by giving out bags, beginning a city-supported education campaign, and raising the fee; advocates supported the ordinance now, regardless of whether the impact may be minimal. Opponents to the ordinance worried about the particulars of the legislation and the difficulties businesses might encounter with the existence of different regulations in different cities (as opposed to a state-wide solution), and gave statistics about the comparatively small impact of retail bags on litter. The Committee agreed that regardless of what happens, a robust education campaign is essential to any kind of constituent-



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engaged environmental success, for example Cambridge gave retail stores stickers to put up that explained the ordinance and that it is city-mandated. Engaging young people in the outreach planning and execution was also discussed.

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED: Summary of Docket #0132; O'Malley PowerPoint Presentation

DOCUMENTS/INFORMATION REQUESTED:

DECISIONS/NEXT STEPS: Working session adjourned.

Prepared By

STAFF LIAISON:

A handwritten signature of Michelle A. Goldberg.

Michelle A. Goldberg

Approved By

CHAIR:

A handwritten signature of Michael F. Flaherty.

Michael F. Flaherty

DATE: 4/5/17

NOTE: These minutes are to be considered draft unless signed by the Committee Chair and Liaison.